



LIBERAL ARTS

The Maturation of the Mexican-Born Immigrant: A Shift in Social Activism

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Approximately one out of every three immigrants in the U.S. is Mexican-born. Observers have commented on the relatively low naturalization rate within this population. However, few authors have considered the participatory implications of this fact. Does a lack of citizenship in the American context, and for many a lack of residency authorization, result in disengagement from U.S. politics during major national elections? This is especially relevant as immigration reform continues as a focus of American politics.

During the fall campaigns of both the 2008 ($n = 240$) and the 2012 ($n = 146$) presidential elections, a handful of bilingual students administered surveys to adult Mexican-born immigrants. Each 20-minute survey was administered verbally, mainly in Spanish. The questionnaire included items measuring how long an immigrant had been in the country, views on various political issues, and general health.

Once all the surveys were completed, I examined patterns of political activity and involvement, comparing the 2008 and 2012 results. The analysis suggests that Mexican immigrants in Indiana are becoming more knowledgeable and incorporated into civic life, even if most lack citizenship at a formal level.

From this regional snapshot of the larger national population, some tentative conclusions become evident. The undocumented population of Mexican-born immigrants is more engaged in civic life than expected and would welcome naturalization. Given their increasing level of political activity, social activism, and knowledge in American politics, the survey results suggest Latino immigrants will develop strong ties to this country.

Research advisor James McCann writes, "In political science, there is still much to learn about the civic inclusion of Latino immigrants, particularly in a state like Indiana where migrant settlement is a relatively new phenomenon. Connor's findings on documentation status and civic engagement are relevant not only for scholars, but also for policymakers considering comprehensive immigration policy reform."

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